

# Committee on Resources

## Full Committee

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### Witness Statement

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#### Executive Director Kathleen Clarke's Testimony before the Congressional Hearing on CARA

**June 12, 1999**

On behalf of Governor Michael O. Leavitt, welcome to the state of Utah. Thank you Congressman Hansen and members of the U. S. House of Representatives Committee on Resources (Cannon and Cook) for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of the Conservation and Reinvestment Act of 1999, the most important national legislation for wildlife conservation, open space and state parks and recreation to reach the floor of Congress in our generation. The Utah Department of Natural Resources stands united with Governor Leavitt, many local elected officials and representatives of wildlife and outdoor recreation organizations from across Utah in our whole-hearted and enthusiastic support of this landmark legislation. Let me give you a few reasons why.

Wildlife-related recreation is in high demand by the citizens of our state, as evidenced by **this** (holding up Krannich Report) recently completed Utah State University report on public attitudes toward wildlife and wildlife-related recreation in Utah. According to the report, quote . . . "Utahns are highly interested in the state's fish and wildlife resources. . . . Clearly Utahns place substantial value on the state's wildlife resources, and view the protection and enhancement of those resources as important to the quality of life enjoyed by residents of the state." Unquote. I want to emphasize here that wildlife-related recreation now takes many forms, from traditional activities such as hunting and fishing to nonconsumptive activities such as birdwatching and photography.

Our mandate from Utahns is clear. Yet, for too long the funding necessary to manage many species of wildlife, and to preserve critical wildlife habitat has simply been unavailable.

The same may be said of our state parks and open space initiatives throughout Utah. Recreation needs have dramatically increased in the last 20 years. An average annual population increase of 2 percent has fueled the demand for more outdoor recreation opportunities in burgeoning urban growth centers from Logan to St. George. As open space disappears, and with it wildlife and outdoor recreation opportunities, there is great concern about preserving our "quality of life in Utah," and ensuring the social, economic and, yes, spiritual values that we all draw from direct contact with our natural world.

Sadly, funding for parks and recreation facilities from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund has been virtually nonexistent over the last several years. At the same time, our unprecedented population growth has created an even greater need for parks, open space and recreation opportunities.

Since 1964, Utah has received nearly \$40 million in LWCF, funding over 400 state parks and recreation projects. Nearly 70 percent of the funds have gone to cities and counties providing close-to-home recreation opportunities. These include such projects as Dimple Dell Regional Park, Sugar House Park, Shepard Lane Park and many other regional and neighborhood parks throughout the state.

LWCF has been essential to development of Utah's state park system. Projects funded with LWCF include state parks at Antelope Island, Bear Lake, Willard Bay, Utah Lake, Wasatch Mountain, Dead Horse Point and Snow Canyon.

Unfortunately, in recent years, several opportunities to enhance and broaden our parks network have slipped away. Many of our parks and recreational facilities are obsolete. Age and over-use have taken their toll on many of our premier state parks.

How will CARA help solve these problems? Of course you are all familiar with the three titles of the CARA legislation. Briefly, Title I is for coastal impact, Title II is for land-base recreation and Title III is for wildlife conservation.

Title II will provide a stable source of funding to:

1. Begin the daunting task of rebuilding our obsolete infrastructure and making needed capitol improvements to our state parks system to meet the demands of a growing population.
2. CARA will supply matching funds for cooperative state and local projects such as community parks and recreation facilities, preservation of open space and the creation of new recreational opportunities for Utah citizens.
3. Existing outdoor recreation experiences will be enhanced by building trails and preserving natural corridors for wildlife interpretation and viewing opportunities.
4. Working cooperatively, wildlife and state parks divisions will combine CARA funding to develop nature trails, interpretive signing and watchable wildlife sites within state and local parks to broaden and enhance visitors' overall outdoor experience.

Title III of the CARA legislation assists wildlife agencies by:

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1. Providing a comprehensive approach to wildlife conservation funding, providing funding to address those species which are not fished or hunted. It will provide for greatly enhanced management of all wildlife, as well as new opportunities to address the problem of threatened and endangered species in Utah. CARA funding will allow biologists to monitor wildlife species and cooperatively manage important wildlife habitat so that many species never reach the threatened or endangered list.
2. CARA revenues could fund purchases of conservation easements, which leaves the land in private ownership, mostly ranches and farms, while preserving critical habitat for wildlife.
3. CARA will help pay for important wildlife education programs for schools and community groups to foster appreciation and responsible stewardship of all wildlife species.

4. It will provide matching funds for cooperative agreements with Utah cities and counties to manage indigenous wildlife while still providing for the economic growth and development of Utah communities off the Wasatch Front. The recently completed habitat conservation plan for Utah prairie dogs between Iron County, Division of Wildlife Resources and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as reported in *The Spectrum* in St. George, is an outstanding example of a cooperative agreement which benefits both wildlife and the citizens of Utah.

It should be noted that rather than purchase of lands, conservation easements, leases and cooperative agreements have become the preferred option in Utah and most western states for preserving critical habitat. Conservation easements also offer Utah forest landowners a solution to protect their forested land from development. Working cooperatively with the Utah Department of Natural Resources, willing landowners may preserve vital watershed and wildlife habitat while continuing to produce wood commodities in a sustainable fashion. As recently as last week, a 10,680 acre conservation easement was established on prime forest and watershed land utilizing Forest Legacy grants as a partnership stimulus. In this way, we can assure that the traditional uses of private lands and the public values of America's forest resources are protected for future generations.

Today fewer than 70 of Utah's over 700 resident wildlife species have a steady, reliable funding base to support their management. Passage of CARA will be a conservation milestone in Utah and the nation for maintaining wildlife diversity and keeping many species off the endangered species list.

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The results of a survey conducted by sociologists at Utah State University indicated that Utah citizens were highly supportive of funding programs to manage for wildlife diversity. Furthermore, given a number of choices, they overwhelmingly preferred having these programs paid for by assessments on energy development. The message is clear--the Conservation and Reinvestment Act of 1999 is exactly what the people of Utah want.

A broad variety of outdoor recreation needs were documented during Governor Leavitt's recent "Utah Great Outdoors Conference." Representatives from every planning district in the state expressed the critical need for reliable and stable funding to keep pace with Utah's expanding population of "outdoor active" people. They also identified the need to replace facilities that are being used in new and more impacting ways, and to maintain critical habitat for wildlife.

What will CARA ultimately mean for Utah and the nation? It will 1) provide for the protection and restoration of our coastal habitats, 2) fund land and water conservation activities, providing essential recreational opportunities for our citizens and 3) provide a consistent and dedicated fund to the states to conserve our precious fish and wildlife resources. All of this will mean we can maintain our quality of life, as our cities and towns experience economic growth, especially in rural Utah.

Passage of CARA would recommit Congress and this nation to the vision that a part of the revenues earned from the depletion of non-renewable offshore oil and gas reserves should be invested in permanent assets that will serve the conservation and recreation needs of all Americans.

Congressman Hansen and members of the committee, once again we stand at the crossroads, faced with an unprecedented opportunity to preserve and enhance our natural resources for generations to come. Please work to enact legislation now for the sake of our children. Because if our children lose touch with the

natural world, if they don't have a place under the sun to play, if they care more about video games and the internet that they do about wildlife and the outdoors, then our precious natural resources are in trouble, and so are our children.

Thank you.

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